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THE SUBCONSCIOUS AND RELIGION

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There is no subject about which popular psychology just now has so much to say as the "subconscious." Since the name came into wide use a dozen years ago, it has come to be regarded as something so definite and well understood as to be itself the explanation of many other things. Its bearing upon questions of religious experience has been particularly emphasized, and, in fact, it is largely on this account that it has aroused so much popular interest. In short, the word "subconscious" is spoken so glibly and taken to be the self-evident solution of so many spiritual problems that it will be worth our while to consider what we really know about it, and especially what its actual relation to religion may be. For, though often misused, there can be no doubt that the term stands for something very fundamental in our mental life, and that its connection with religion is in one way or another extremely important.

The conception of the subconscious, or the unconscious, originated, I suppose, with Leibniz. It was made popular as a philosophic doctrine by von Hartmann in his fascinating work, *Die Philosophie des Unbewussten*. But it was not until relatively recent times that it was imported from philosophy into psychology in the strict sense of the term. This was done partly by F. W. H. Myers and his followers, partly by various neurologists and medical men whose researches and practice led them into the field of pathological mental phenomena. Coming into psychology through this double doorway, the conception of the subconscious has had a rather varied development. The physicians have groped and grubbed and worked their way through a mass of abnormal and often very unpleasant cases, mining what facts they could; while the Myers school has been borne, often on the wings of intuition, to conclusions far more interesting, and, if true, metaphysically far more significant.

Myers's hypothesis was that the conscious self of each of us is

only a small part of the real self; that underneath the conscious personality there extends a much larger "subliminal" self, below the threshold of our immediate awareness, behind the door, dominating many of our actions and our thoughts by powers not known to us, and constituting the real and essential personality, of which the conscious self is but a broken gleam. He writes:—

The conscious self of each of us, as we call it,—the empirical, the supraliminal self, as I should prefer to say,—does not comprise the whole of the consciousness or of the faculty within us. There exists a more comprehensive consciousness, a profounder faculty, which for the most part remains potential only so far as regards the life of earth, but from which the consciousness and the faculty of earth-life are mere selections, and which reasserts itself in its plenitude after the liberating change of death.¹

This does not mean that we have two selves: it means that the one true self is the totality of which the supraliminal part is but a fraction.

He continues:—

I mean by the subliminal self that part of the self which is commonly subliminal; and I conceive that there may be, not only co-operations between these quasi-independent trains of thought, but also upheavals and alternations of personality of many kinds, so that what was once below the surface may for a time, or permanently, rise above it. And I conceive also that no self of which we can here have cognizance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self—revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited through an organism not so framed as to afford it full manifestation.²

Within this subliminal part of us, as within the supraliminal part, there are various kinds of phenomena, some lofty, some "dissolutive." To illustrate this, Myers uses a simile which has become famous, the comparison, namely, of our empirical consciousness to the visible spectrum and of our subliminal faculties to the ether waves which we cannot see.

At both ends of this spectrum, I believe that our evidence indicates a momentous prolongation. Beyond the red end, of course, we already

¹ *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, i, 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

know that vital faculty of some kind must needs extend. We know that organic processes are constantly taking place within us which are not subject to our control, but which make the very foundation of our physical being. We know that the habitual limits of our voluntary act can be far extended under the influence of strong excitement. It need not surprise us to find that appropriate artifices—hypnotism and self-suggestion—can carry the power of our will over our organism to a yet further point.

The faculties that lie beyond the *violet* end of our psychological spectrum will need more delicate exhibition and will command a less ready belief. The active energy which lies beyond the violet end of our solar spectrum is less obviously influential in our material world than is the dark heat which lies beyond the red end. Even so, one may say, the influence of the ultra-intellectual or supernormal faculties upon our welfare as terrene organisms is less marked in common life than the influence of the organic or subnormal faculties. Yet it is *that* prolongation of our spectrum upon which our gaze will need to be most strenuously fixed. It is *there* that we shall find our inquiry opening upon the cosmic prospect, and inciting us upon an endless way.³

It is, according to Myers, from this violet end of the spectrum, so to speak—from the supernormal part of our subliminal selves—that come the insight of the poet and the intuition of the prophet. Art and religion, mysticism, love, invention—these and many other striking facts of human nature are thus made intelligible by one hypothesis. “An ‘inspiration of genius’ will be in truth a *subliminal uprush*, an emergence into the current of ideas which the man is consciously manipulating of other ideas, which he has not consciously originated, but which have shaped themselves beyond his will, in profounder regions of his being.”

All readers of the *Varieties of Religious Experience* will remember how much Professor James was influenced by these views of Myers. Not that he accepted Myers’s hypothesis in its totality. James was too keen a psychologist and too empirical a philosopher to consider Myers’s view a demonstrated truth. Nor did he feel at all sure that the subconscious part of the mind had sufficient unity to be regarded as a personality. The evidence, in his opinion, was as yet far too scanty for us to come to any conclusion on the exact nature and organization of these subliminal facts. But he was convinced that the conscious self came into

³ *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, p. 18.

touch with, and was influenced by, psychic forces that psychology has as yet hardly recognized. This he regards as of prime importance to the subject of psychology. "We have," said he, "in the fact that the conscious personality is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come, a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, is literally and objectively true as far as it goes." And his own "over-belief" was that our being upon its further side plunges "into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely 'understandable' world."

It is not surprising that a view in itself so romantic as Myers's hypothesis of the subliminal self, presented with such charm of style, and having the sympathy, if not the positive support, of our greatest psychologist, should make a very strong appeal not only to that large class which is ever eager for the mysterious, but to many serious thinkers, theologians, and religious men, who find in the works of Myers and James a new source of religious hope and faith. Had not this discovery of the subconscious self come, indeed, in the very nick of time, when the old foundations were being undermined by criticism and thrown down by science? What an unforeseen, unlooked-for reversal of the rôle of science this was! No longer the foe, science was now become the ally of faith. Hereafter Higher Criticism and Rationalism and Naturalism might do their worst. Only the outworks of religion were open to their attack, and the man of faith might when he chose retire to the impregnable fortress of his Subconscious Self.

The rapidity with which this view has spread is one of the most interesting facts in the intellectual history of recent years, and a witness to the wide-felt need of a belief in something somehow supernatural. The popular magazines have got hold of it, and the man in the street knows that there are two of him. Preachers have made their congregations familiar with this new basis for religion, and books written by scientific—and by unscientific—men have taken it for granted. I quote a typical passage from one of them:

"The subconscious mind is a normal part of our spiritual nature. There is reason to believe that it is purer, more sensitive to good and evil, than our conscious mind. . . . Though it is doubtless

more generic and in closer contact with the Universal Spirit than reason, yet its creations bear the imprint of individual genius.”⁴ Another writer puts it thus: “Man’s mind is something far larger than he is conscious of: his consciousness is but a speck of light illuminating one part of his whole self. . . . Or, to put the matter in a still simpler metaphor, the mind is like an iceberg of which the greater part is hidden under the sea.”⁵ A distinguished theologian varies the figure, likening the mind not to an iceberg, but—as well as I can make it out—to a sort of bottle with a narrow neck and no bottom. The narrow neck is our consciousness, the main part of the vessel is our subconscious, and from it “filters” up the contents of our minds. Moreover, “the narrow-necked vessel has an opening at the bottom, which is not stopped by any sponge. Through it there are incomings and outgoings, which stretch away into infinity, and in fact proceed from, and are, God Himself.”⁶

It is evident that we are here dealing with a question of prime importance for more things than psychology. If the mind is the sort of thing described above, we ought to know it; and we ought to consider carefully the evidence on which the conclusion is based. To get at the evidence, however, on which the belief in the subconscious rests is made doubly difficult by the fact that the term in question is exceedingly ambiguous. Like other amiable beasts of burden, it has been so overworked that it is now good for little but a vacation—a reward which it might be well to grant. The many meanings which it has had to bear can, however, be reduced to three or possibly four principal ones, which we shall now examine in turn.

The first of these uses of the word “subconscious” makes it synonymous with the *fringe* or *background* of the mind. This is, of course, a part of our immediate experience, of our direct awareness, with nothing subliminal or supernormal about it. If our consciousness be represented by a series of concentric circles, the innermost of these will stand for the centre of closest attention, and the outermost zone for the fringe-region or back-

⁴ Elwood Worcester, *Religion and Medicine*, p. 42.

⁵ Dreamer, *Body and Soul*, p. 39.

⁶ William Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern*.

ground. Between the two there is no break, no "dissociation," but one shades off into the other by a gradual decrease in vividness of content. This outer zone of our consciousness, however, though not attended to, is often of decisive importance in guiding both our thought and our action. We seldom realize all the factors that go to determine our decisions and our judgments. The syllogism is really a very poor representative of the way we think. There is a great deal more in our consciousness at any moment than we pay attention to; and this great, vague, unanalyzed mass of what Marshall calls our "sub-attentive consciousness" furnishes a large part of the data for our judgments, and often forms our opinions when we think we have reasoned our way to them. "The inventor, in working on his particular invention, has a mass of accumulated material and experience, indispensable for the development of the invention, but which is in the background of his consciousness. Similarly, the mathematician, in solving his problem, which forms the focus of his consciousness, possesses a body of knowledge or a mass of material which, though it lies in the periphery of his consciousness, still forms the mainstay of his particular investigation."⁷ Both our rougher and more general opinions and our more exact discriminations depend in large measure on what Jastrow calls "mass impressionism"—the total unanalyzed effect which the object in question has upon the background of our minds. The bank cashier may be able to detect the counterfeit bill with unfailing certainty, and yet be quite unable to tell you how he does it, or to describe with any exactness the earmarks of genuine paper money.

The influence of the background upon life and action is no less marked. In Professor Ward's opinion, the background or "continuum," as he calls it, is the original form of psychic life, and it is from it as a matrix that all the more sharply defined forms of consciousness have developed. It is not at all to be considered as a mere reservoir of sensations unattended to. Besides the sensations and the hazy ideas, and more primitive and fundamental than they, there are in the fringe all manner of latent and incipient impulses, attitudes, tendencies to reaction, partially suppressed feelings, wishes, volitions. "The instinctive

⁷ Sidis and Goodhart, *Multiple Personality*, p. 241.

desires and impulses have their roots in it, and get their power from it; the inborn reactions upon the environment, so far as they are conscious, the native antipathies and tendencies, our deepest loves and hates—all these are parts of it and grow up out of it." Moreover, as I have written elsewhere,

It is the inheritor of our past, and forms what might be called a feeling memory. At every moment our whole outlook is colored by our past impressions and ideas. These are not present as such—they are not distinctly remembered—but a general feeling-tone and tendency to reaction is established by them and is modified by each event of life; in short, the total feeling background is affected by all our thoughts and experiences in such a way that they influence every passing moment. Our total past experience is in a sense summed and massed in the background, and thus becomes a compendium of our history. But it is much more than that; it is largely the store-house of heredity as well. It is in the line of direct descent, and inherits an endless amount of wisdom gained with so much toil by our entire ancestry.⁸

Thus it has a kind of "*racial* or *instinctive* wisdom which seems to put it in touch, in a perfectly natural manner, with forces hidden from the clearly conscious personality and which makes it wiser in many ways than the individual."

There is nothing mysterious about this, nothing supernatural, nothing that is in any sense a discovery. The fringe region is in no way "higher" or "purer" than the centre of consciousness. It contains evil as well as good, or, rather it contains neither the one nor the other, but the materials for both. Only conscious personality is moral—nothing is good except a good will. The background is only a background; it is there not for its own sake but for the sake of the total personality. The best and purest aspect of the mind, the aspect of it most highly developed and the most nobly human, is to be found not in the obscure shadows of the background, but in the clear sunlight of full consciousness.

A second meaning sometimes given to the term "subconscious" makes it identical with the unconscious, and interprets the unconscious as the purely physiological. It is a generally accepted hypothesis that brain facts accompany mind facts, either as causal substratum or as correlate. While it has not been absolutely

⁸ Psychology of Religious Belief, pp. 15 and 23.

demonstrated, it seems most probable that certain brain events are so correlated with certain mind events that the former are regularly followed or accompanied by the latter. If this is true, then many of the phenomena of consciousness are to be explained by reference to the unconscious, that is, to physical phenomena in the nervous system. Moreover, the physiological mechanism of the body performs many purposeful acts without direction of consciousness, such for example as the numerous organic, reflex, and instinctive movements. May we not, therefore, explain the various phenomena commonly attributed to the action of the "subconscious" as due to the unconscious, that is, to the automatic activity of the nervous system? Many of these phenomena were thus explained by Doctor Carpenter over sixty years ago as due to "unconscious cerebration," and a large number of psychologists today insist that there is nothing in the facts that have come to light since Carpenter's *Mental Physiology* was written to force us to any other principle of explanation.

It is plain enough, however, that this explanation will suit neither the Myers school nor the majority of the pathologists. Nor are these gentlemen any better satisfied with the first meaning of the word "subconscious" suggested above. They will insist that the subconscious is not merely the physiological, and that it is not to be identified with the content of the fringe. For them the real question of the subconscious, therefore, is whether this fringe material is the last thing in the way of psychic stuff, or whether there is genuine consciousness not felt by the personal centre and yet connected with the same physical organism. Does the consciousness of which we are aware exhaust all the psychical phenomena centring in our bodies, or are there pulses of consciousness entirely outside the circle of our awareness? In other words, to use at last an unambiguous term, is there such a thing as a *co-consciousness*?

I said above that there were three or possibly four meanings which the word "subconscious" at times bore. Its interpretation as a co-consciousness is, of course, the third of these. The fourth, if there be a fourth, is very hard to state. We sometimes find the word "subconscious"—or more commonly the word "unconscious"—"das Unbewusste," "*l'inconscient*"—used to

mean some kind of psychic state which is yet unconscious. Bergson, for example, appeals at times to such unconscious mental states. Freud, in some parts of the *Traumdeutung*, insists upon unconscious psychic states in no uncertain terms, and in one passage quotes Professor Lipps as an upholder of the same view.

Just what can be meant by "unconscious psychic states" it is a little hard to see. The term, of course, immediately suggests round squares and true falsehoods. Freud's own explanation of the anomaly seems to be that it is "something, I know not what." It is, he insists, "the genuinely real psychic [das eigentlich reale psychische], as completely unknown to us as to its inner nature as is the reality of the outer world, and given to us through the data of consciousness just as incompletely as the outer world is given through the sense organs."

This appeal to the unknowable to explain the contradictory is not very enlightening. Hence some of his admirers—and who that has read the *Traumdeutung* can fail to be of that number?—insist on other interpretations of the *Unbewusste*. Dr. Bernard Hart suggests that the word as used by both Freud and Jung should be taken merely as a concept, a short-hand expression for the manipulation of our experience, rather than as a name for anything thought of as really existing. Other readers of Freud, in spite of the passage referred to above, will insist upon interpreting his "Unbewusstes" in terms of co-conscious mental states. And, in fact, if the term is to be taken as referring to anything real, it is hard to see what else it can mean. Hence we shall now turn to the question of the existence and the nature of the co-conscious.

The facts to which appeal is made to prove the existence of a co-consciousness are of two general classes: first, those found in normal subjects; and, second, those found in abnormal subjects, whether their abnormal condition be natural or induced temporarily by artificial methods. Limits of space make it impossible to present here a critical exposition of the facts in question, and we must, therefore, content ourselves with the conclusions (so far as there are such) to which the weight of scientific opinion inclines. In brief, then, the evidence does not seem to

be such as to force us to the hypothesis of a co-consciousness in normal human beings. Many facts, indeed, have been adduced which strongly suggest such a view, but none that make it indispensable. They can, I think, invariably be explained in terms of the fringe or of the nerve processes, or by the accepted laws of psychology. Several competent psychologists, to be sure, would not concur in this view, and further investigation may yet show that their position is preferable to the one presented above. The fact, however, that these psychologists regard the split-off states of normal persons as of rare occurrence and of slight importance, and the difficulty of drawing any hard and fast line between normal and abnormal subjects, make the difference between the two positions relatively unimportant. It is almost indifferent whether we say that normal persons may occasionally have fleeting, split-off conscious states, or that normal persons never have such states, but that many or most of us are occasionally abnormal.

When we turn to the pathological cases, we meet a very different state of things. The evidence here for co-conscious mental life is so strong that, if one adopts an empirical point of view and refuses to decide the matter on *a priori* considerations, it is very difficult to resist the conclusion that within the same mind there may exist at the same time both a principal and a subordinate centre of conscious life, split off from, though mutually influencing, each other. I must hasten to add that this conclusion is not shared by all psychologists. It is, however, the opinion of the majority of those who have had first-hand experience with these pathological phenomena. The facts which they cite seem to show indisputable marks of the presence of consciousness, and of some consciousness other than that of the patient's leading personality. The only alternative explanation is unconscious cerebration; and the ascription of so much intelligence to purely physiological processes as that hypothesis would require would be enough to make one seriously doubt the consciousness of one's fellow-beings.

It may indeed very well be, as suggested above, that even in some of us so-called normal persons there are at times fleeting gleams of conscious life split off from the main psychic stream;

or, if we prefer another way of putting it, that any of us may occasionally become temporarily abnormal. After the investigations of Prince and other alienists, it is difficult to doubt that mental shocks and emotional excitement tend not only to confuse but to dissociate consciousness. If this be the case, there will be all degrees of dissociation, ranging from cases of complete or approximate mental unity down through greater and greater degrees of dissociation, until at last we find several fairly independent and fairly unified separate "personalities" or "complexes" functioning in one body, or until even these are disintegrated into more elementary groups of psychic states, each narrower, less unified, and less stable than the last.

The nature and content of the co-conscious states of persons only incipiently abnormal—and of normal persons, if normal persons have them—can be pretty well made out from some of Prince's and Sidis's investigations. They are invariably limited and disintegrated, and usually quite unimportant and unrelated to any purpose. Sensations, feelings, and impulses unconnected, and simply flickering into life and out again, like the light of the firefly in the dark, constitute as a rule their content. They are seldom combined into anything that can be called a *thought*. They are without self-consciousness, and there is "no evidence to show that the dissociated consciousness is capable of wider and more original synthesis than is involved in adapting habitual acts to the circumstances of the moment." "There is no hard and fast line between the conscious and the subconscious, for at times what belongs to one passes into the other, and vice versa. The waking self is varying the grouping of its thoughts all the time in such a way as to be continually including and excluding the subconscious thoughts." The split-off states, except in thoroughly pathological cases or in artificially produced abnormal conditions, give rise to no "automatisms" or independent and disconnected actions and hallucinations.⁹

In extreme cases, such as that of Miss Beauchamp and BA

⁹The substance of this paragraph and the quotations in it are taken from Prince, "Some of the Present Problems of Abnormal Psychology," Psychological Review, xii, 135-139. See also Sidis and Goodhart, Multiple Personality, *passim*.

reported by Morton Prince, we have, indeed, in the co-conscious, something approximating much more closely to the popular notion of the "Subconscious Self." Miss Beauchamp's third alternating "complex" (known as "Sally") not only claimed to be co-conscious—and proved it to the satisfaction of Dr. Prince and most of his readers—but developed also a very definite character, which she retained with consistency from her first appearance until finally "squeezed."¹⁰ She was, namely, throughout a rather pert, interesting, immature young girl, differing noticeably in tastes and manners from both the other personalities, considerably inferior to both in knowledge and intellectual power, and markedly inferior to one of them in conscience and character. In Dr. Prince's other case, B, who has given pretty conclusive evidence of being co-conscious with A,¹¹ maintains, like Sally, a perfectly distinct and consistent character throughout. She does not resemble Sally in immaturity, but is decidedly inferior to the complete and normal integrated personality. It should be added that both these co-conscious "personalities" have written their autobiographies, that of B in particular being highly intelligent and instructive. It is, to be sure, questionable whether either "Sally" or "B" is as much of a personality as each claims to be. No doubt they are well-developed, *alternating* personalities, but it is far from clear that as co-conscious entities they have sufficient unity and completeness to deserve the title *personality* or *self*. My colleague, Professor John E. Russell, has made the suggestion that in the co-conscious state such "personalities" are merely "complexes" or groups of ideas, and that the claim of each to unbroken co-conscious *personal* life is due to an illusion of the memory. However this may be, it is interesting to note that "Sally" and "B," the only "co-conscious selves" whose histories have been investigated, have originated out of "complexes" or groups of feelings, ideas, and impulses within the central consciousness, complexes of the same sort as are to be found in any of us. Who is there that has not

¹⁰ See Morton Prince, *Dissociation of a Personality*, 1906, *passim*.

¹¹ See Prince, "Experiments to Determine Co-conscious Ideation," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, iii, 33–42. Prince and Peterson, "Experiments in Psycho-galvanic Reactions from Co-conscious Ideas," *Ibid.*, iii, 114–131.

noted in his own experience how the emotion due to some insult, slight, or injury can gather to itself special ideas and tendencies and become a little centre of relative independence within the mind?

It is in some such general way that a dissociated "personality" originates. It does not start as a "subconsciousness." It was not there in the beginning like the submerged two-thirds of the iceberg, nor like the bottom of the "narrow-necked vessel" which is "not stopped by any sponge." It originates as other ideas originate, and is as much a matter of the common day as they. There is nothing mysterious or supernatural about its origin—unless, indeed, disease be supernatural. And this is true, not only of its origin but of its content and its powers. The co-conscious ideas, complexes, and personalities that have been investigated show little evidence of being in any way "higher" and "purer" than the normal personality. It was perhaps natural to suppose that the subconscious was wiser and better than the normal self—until it had been seen. But now at length we have two subconscious selves "flowering" and walking out upon the scenes and writing their autobiographies; and they turn out to be nothing very wonderfully wise, but just B and Sally.

I have dealt thus at length with the co-conscious because it is as a co-conscious that the "subconscious" is usually interpreted by popular writers, preachers, and lecturers. It is important for the serious student of this subject not to be misled by glowing pictures of the "Undermind," but to realize that the co-conscious, so far as the evidence goes, is either non-existent or practically negligible in normal persons; while in pathological subjects, though sometimes, indeed, the source of valuable ideas and useful actions, it is always limited and inferior to the waking self, and likely to be very far from beautiful or sublime. What I have said of the co-conscious, however, must not be taken as a failure to recognize the immense importance and the unquestionable value in each of us of the "subconscious" in the broader sense. And in this broader sense the word "subconscious" may still be of use. If we put together under this term all those factors of ourselves which are not to be identified with the attentive consciousness—the physiological, the fringe, and the co-conscious

in those who possess it—we cannot fail to be impressed with the enormous influence exerted by these upon our lives.

I have already spoken of the importance of the fringe region, and I need add nothing here; nor need I point out how our nervous systems unite us to the distant past of the race and to our own past, preserving for us both instincts and habits, and enabling us to use our memories and thus utilize our past experience. If we interpret the subconscious as meaning both the fringe and the nervous system, we may say that it is largely this that makes us what we are. "The whole of our past psychical life," says Bergson, "conditions our present state, without being its necessary determinant; while also it reveals itself in our character." It is plain, therefore, how important an influence the subconscious in this broader sense exerts upon each man's religion. To the work of Starbuck and James, in particular, we owe a great deal for the insight they have given us in this matter. A man's religion is not merely a matter of his clear-cut conscious processes: it is bound up with his whole psycho-physical organism. Truly, he who loves God loves him with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He loves God not only with his soul and mind, but with his body, too. Our religion goes deeper down into our lives than most things, and is knit up with all that we are. It springs out of our connection with the past; it involves our individual, and even our racial, history; it is one aspect of what we are and all we hope to be. This is the truth at the heart of much modern writing about the subconscious and religion—only in "*ein bisschen andern Worten.*"

The influence of the subconscious upon the religion of most of us is due to our racial inheritance and our individual history. By nature and heredity we come into the world with certain instincts and needs and ways of reacting which respond to our condition of dependence in such a way as to make most of us "incurably religious." Here, then, is one of the "subconscious" roots of our religion. The other root of it, as I have said, is to be sought in the particular environment and experience of the individual. We are born as babies into a world of grown-ups, and our parents, our teachers, and, in fact, society as a whole bring the irresistible might of their combined influence to bear

upon our pygmy selves to make us religious. This influence is never outgrown. Though in our later reasonings we may think we have freed ourselves from it, it is present and ineradicable in our subconsciousness, influencing our conscious lives in ways that we do not recognize. The whole drama of our maturer years is presented before a background determined almost entirely by our social inheritance and our early experiences. Freud has recently shown how very large a part of the material of our dreams is made up of childhood memories—memories, some of which had seemed to be quite forgotten. Sir Francis Galton years ago pointed out the fact that even in our waking hours our minds are incredibly full of ideas to which we pay little or no attention, a large part of which are memories drawn from childhood and youth.

And it is not merely ideas and visual and verbal images that fill the backgrounds of our minds. More important and influential are the moods, emotions, impulses, and prejudices, the “complexes” which have their roots in some half-forgotten past and twine themselves all through our mental history. Their abiding place is in the darker region of the fringe, or possibly in the quite unconscious cells of the nervous system, but they influence our sentiments, our creeds, our actions, in ways that might surprise us, were they fully recognized. Especially influential in determining the background of our lives are our desires and early ideals. Freud has shown (with some exaggeration, to be sure) how large a rôle desire plays in forming our dreams, and it is certain that not only in dreams but in our waking moments desire, whether suppressed or recognized, has a leading part in shaping our whole subconscious or unconscious life. Thus it comes about that the ideals, the longings, the ardent wishes of youth sink into the subliminal region, and constitute a large part of its ultimate return contribution to conscious life. Hence the ideal nature of much that springs from the subliminal region of lofty souls. Hence also much of the religious trend that we find shaping so large a part of our lives. The religious ideas, promptings, emotions, and ways of viewing things, impressed upon us during youth, or resulting naturally from inherited tendencies, become so ingrained into the very texture of our minds that we can never

get away from them. They tinge and influence our feelings, our opinions, and our total reaction upon the world in ways that we know and in ways that we know not.

This is another way of saying that the subconscious is eminently conservative. And in whatever way you interpret the "subconscious" this remains true. The conservative nature of the physiological is painfully evident to every one who has tried to break a habit. And after what has been said on previous pages of this essay, nothing need be added to show how the fringe-region and the co-conscious treasure up the past and use it to influence the present and predetermine the future. This is the ultimate explanation of religious conservatism. Theology, the explicit formulation of religious belief, usually lags behind science and philosophy because the two latter make sense perception and clear reason their criteria, whereas religion is a matter of the whole man, and is determined to a very great extent by the racial and personal past, by the ideas that have become ingrained and are now revered, and by the feeling of profound respect for tradition, all of which, though they are at times matters of attentive reasoning, have their roots very largely in the background of the mind or even in the purely habitual reactions of the nervous system.

The great source of the content of the subconscious is, then, the conscious—the experience of the past, both the race and the individual being taken into account. Is there any other source for this content—some supernatural source, different in kind from that already described? I do not see that psychology can answer this question with any definite proofs. It will, of course, proceed on the assumption that there is no such source, until the necessity of the contrary hypothesis is demonstrated. A superhuman source of revelation, though something in which the philosopher may well believe, is not something which the man of science can ever verify. Leaving aside hypotheses that involve the supernatural, he must seek—very likely in a plodding and prosaic fashion—to find out what can be done with the natural. And in our particular problem his methods have not as yet proved inadequate. The prophets and mystics have, indeed, been greatly influenced by the subconscious, but it is far from clear that there

is anything mysterious about the ultimate source of this subconscious influence. The highest ideals of the community or the nation, accepted with enthusiasm and emotion by the youthful mind, "apperceived" by the great mass of man's instincts and inherited impulses, pondered over carefully and repeatedly, and allowed to continue their activity in the fringe or in the form of unconscious cerebration—these certainly go far towards explaining so much of the messages of the prophets as need be attributed to subconscious origin. Nor does this view necessarily exclude the possibility of divine influence, inspiration, and communion with God. It is difficult to see why God should choose to communicate with a split-off complex or a brain cell rather than with the man himself. What is highest in the religious genius is to be sought in his conscious states rather than in some form of insensibility.

It has often been suggested that telepathy is one source of the subconscious, and this is of course quite possible. The evidence in favor of the existence of telepathy is strong, and, if there really is such a thing, the subconscious—however interpreted—would very likely be influenced by it. There is, however, no good reason for regarding the subconscious as the exclusive channel of such influence. In advance of empirical data on the subject, telepathy, if it exist, is as likely to affect one mind state as another, and the conscious mind seems quite as likely to be directly open to its influence as the subconscious. And, of course, even though it should be proved that telepathy from other minds is one source of the content of the subconscious, it would still remain true (in default of evidence to the contrary) that the *ultimate* source of this content should be sought in the social environment—that is, in the past experience, the ideas, ideals, impulses, and longings of the race.

Though the ultimate source of the content of the subconscious is thus perfectly natural, its influence upon the mind of the individual often makes itself felt in ways that inevitably seem to him extremely mysterious, and that are consequently interpreted by him and by those who know him as tokens of some supernatural power. Particularly is this true in the case of those who have a tendency toward abnormality. And, inasmuch as many of the most influential representatives of the religious life have

been at times and in some respects slightly psychopathic, this influence of the subconscious upon the conscious is of special interest to the student of religion. The psychologist, however, though understanding how natural, and indeed inevitable, it is for the religious individual to interpret the strange things that come into his mind as of supernatural origin, insists upon looking for a natural explanation. And this he finds in a series of phenomena outside the field of religion which exhibit the same peculiarities. Thus he is enabled to subsume his religious facts under the more general classes furnished him by psychology.

The religious facts which I have here in mind are such things as violent but unaccountable impulses to do certain things, fixed ideas whose source cannot be traced, "inspirational speaking," so far as this is not to be accounted for by the ordinary laws of association, motor automatisms, visions, and the like. These all bring with them the sense of external origination—of being *given* or imposed from without. Now this feeling is a well recognized characteristic of the working of the co-conscious, wherever found. Moreover, all the phenomena above referred to have parallels in non-religious cases, where the explanation is plainly to be had in terms of a dissociation of consciousness. The impulses and fixed ideas found in many religious persons are not different psychologically—though they be ethically at the antipodes—from the "phobias" that Freud is finding in the "unconscious" and Sidis in the "co-conscious." The "inspiration" of the prophet, like that of the poet or of the inventor, often seems to have its immediate source in the deeper and unconscious parts of his being. Just how the subconscious acts in these cases is of course not certain, but that there is some subconscious mechanism here at work, as even in our every-day search for a forgotten name, seems evident. The prophet ponders long over the condition of his people and the will of God. Then some day suddenly the sought-for solution rushes into his mind—he finds a message ready-made upon his tongue; and it is almost inevitable that he should preface it with the words: "Thus hath Yahweh showed me!" As for the extreme cases of religious visions and motor automatisms, one has only to look at a single page of the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* for parallels to both.

I would not be understood by this to imply that the religious geniuses who have been slightly psychopathic are *mere* "psychopaths." I have said, indeed, that dissociation probably is an abnormal state; but this means simply that it differs from the normal human condition. It does not mean that such dissociation is always an impediment to human usefulness. That the ordinary man should be without this characteristic is doubtless best for the race, just as it is best we should not all be poets or have the "artistic temperament." But that does not mean that we should be better off with no poets or artists. Prince is coming to the conclusion that, though the dissociated states (except of a most elementary sort) are abnormal, the susceptibility to them under quite common conditions is normal. It may very well be that for certain purposes dissociated mind states have their special value; they may, for instance, function more readily than purely physiological formations, thus enriching the controlling consciousness with more possible ideas from which the laws of association may choose, or possibly endowing the psycho-physical organism with more immediately available force. The value of such mental conditions, in any event, must be determined not by asking ourselves whether they are usual or result from usual physical or psychical conditions, but by looking to the results which they achieve. As James puts it, the true criterion of value is expressed in the words, "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots." Now if we examine the fruits of such psychopathic dispositions we find that they are varied. In the great majority of cases they are bad, hence the emphasis I have put on the absurdity of looking to the "subconscious" as nobler and purer than the conscious self. But in the case of some noble but psychopathic personalities the split-off states do seem to be of real use; though even here, it must be remembered, the highest and noblest part of the man is his conscious personality. Especially in the case of many great religious leaders do we find psychopathic conditions that seem to have contributed a good deal toward making them the useful men they were. Consider, for example, Ezekiel, Mohammed, George Fox, Saint Paul!—the reader will be able to add to the list many other names. In these men and women much of the force which made them great and useful seems to have been

connected with their psychopathic disposition. Professor James writes:

In the psychopathic temperament we have the emotionality which is the *sine qua non* of moral perception; we have the intensity and tendency to emphasize which are the essence of practical vigor; and we have the love of metaphysics and mysticism which carry one's interests beyond the surface of the sensible world. What, then, is more natural than that this temperament should introduce one to regions of religious truth, to the corners of the universe, which your robust Philistine type of nervous system, forever offering its biceps to be felt, thumping its breast, and thanking Heaven that it hasn't a single morbid fiber in its composition, would be sure to hide forever from its self-satisfied possessor.¹²

In quoting thus from Professor James, however, I am going beyond the immediate subject of this essay, for the psychopathic state is not synonymous with the dissociated state, and a psychopath with all the advantages claimed for him in the passage just quoted need not possess a co-consciousness. The converse is certainly true—the great majority of those possessing dissociated mind states have none of the superiorities set forth by James. Moreover, while some kind of co-consciousness has probably characterized many of the religious leaders of the race, and while they have owed much of their influence to it, it still remains true, as it seems to me at least, that such dissociations can be of advantage only under special and unusual conditions, and, I may add, under conditions less likely to recur in the future than in the past. Split-off states are never an end, but are at best a means only. At best, they are sources of weakness as well as of strength. The highest type of man in the religious life as well as elsewhere is the unified and rational self. For our ideal we look not so much to Ezekiel as to Amos, not so much to Fox as to Luther, not so much to Paul as to Jesus.

¹² *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 25.